

September
2007

See page 7 for
progress on the
historic DEPOT!

100%
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RAG
CONTENT

Depot Town Rag

Volume 22, Number 7

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

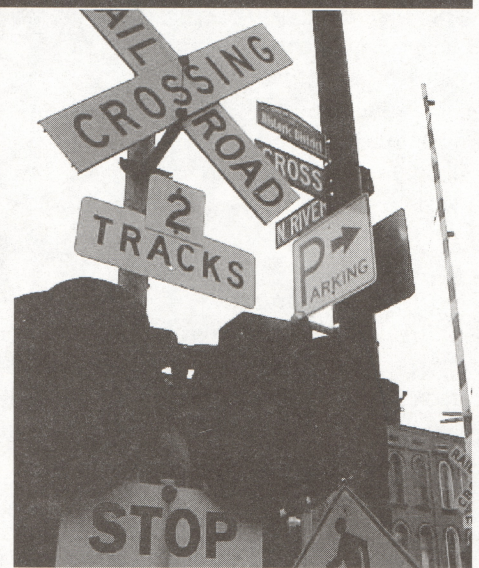
**Coming
through
here
daily:
Some of the
largest moving machines
ever on land**



School is back in session and the kids are walking through the neighborhood daily. They've done it for years—and it's time for us to teach our rail safety lessons again. Ypsi has been a "teacher town" since The Normal School was dedicated in 1852 and we all know that sometimes we have to teach the lesson more than once.

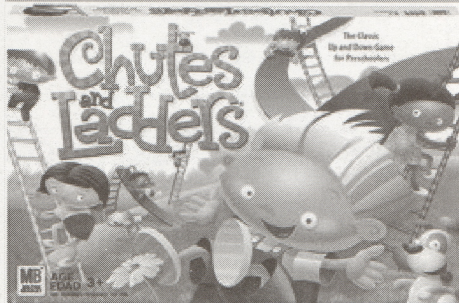
Post-graduates—who can become accustomed to the giant freight and passenger trains that roar through our block—are encouraged to listen up too. EVERYBODY LISTEN UP. It's time for our annual Neighborhood Refresher Course on Railway Safety (NRCRS).

There's a test on page five.



Signs of life at a complex crossing

**Depot Town's annual
FALLAPALOOZA
9 a.m. – 6 p.m. Saturday
29 September
FAMILY FESTIVAL**



Featuring a giant
CHUTES & LADDERS

*On a huge game board in the street
w/ sponsoring companies*

- A Giant Chutes & Ladders game...
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- Story time • Corn Hole toss
- Craft booth

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- Crafters • Rock Wall
- Chutes & Ladders Tournament
(separate from Giant board)
- Webkinz Demonstration
- Clowns • Face Painting
- Live Music in Aubree's parking lot

To benefit S.O.S. Crisis Center

Survives growing up in depot district

Cathy Davis came from Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania in 1942. Her father had taken a job at the Bomber Plant and rented a large apartment across from the train depot.

Her dad, Bill Davis, got a second job as bartender at Ken's (*Aubree's Saloon*). "He told my sister and me we could make some money cleaning the rooms of the hotel upstairs where the railroad workers lived."

"Weber's Drug was next door. That was my favorite place, at the soda bar." She remembers other stores on Cross Street: Sutton's paint store, Standard Printing, the Eagles' Club, and the Post Office sub-station run by Mr. Brower.

Cathy's mom, Rose Davis, sent her to Sinkule's Market or the Variety Store on the south side of Cross. She would pass by Moyer-Fletcher Studio (*Enchanted Florist*) and Simon Brothers' Wholesale where she and a girlfriend would stop to see an uncle and get a free candy bar now and then.

"Some of my best memories are ice skating on Frog Island. The City Rec Department flooded the football field every winter and turned on the floodlights with piped-in music and it was a magical time."

"Anderson & Deck was next to the entrance of Frog Island (*Nelson Amos Studio*,

Salt City Antiques), and Mayflower Cartage just east of that (*Quinn's Essentials*). Across the street was City Body Shop and then Ring's Party Store."

"We walked up the tracks to the Gilbert House for outdoor movies on the back lawn," she remembers. "Everyone brought popcorn and a blanket."

She remembers Forbes Cleaners, Bill Short's neon sign shop, and Delano Plumbing on River Street. "There was a church on the corner of Photo where Reverend Dan Baughey was the minister."

"The kids knew the gate-tender at the railroad crossing," she says, "and he would wave to us and make sure we didn't cross the tracks when the gates were down."

As Cathy grew up, she baby sat for all the Geer children at one time or another (*Janowiak Funeral Home*). She helped spin records at the Teen Canteen at St. Luke's Church House where school superintendent Chapelle's wife would often be the chaperone.

In the 1960s, Cathy went to work at Motor State Products where she met and married Ron Guidebeck. "We like to tell about getting married in Hell, Michigan," and they now live near Pinckney.

A back-to-school story from the 1850s

-From Harvey C. Colburn's *The Story of Ypsilanti*, 1921

Regular *Rag* readers may wish to clip and save this old tale for today's students who have recently returned to classes:

"The students of the period were serious-minded young men and women, who thought of their school experience as the opportunity for laying the foundations of a life, were hard workers and had little time for the lighter amusements. Many of them were unsophisticated country boys, bashful and awe-struck at first sight of the imposing Seminary.

"A fair type was Hall Tripp, who paid his father in cash for his time until he should be of age, the amount being equivalent to

Railroad lingo lingers long on this block

Kevin Waite, an Ann Arbor Railroad operator who dispatches freights between Toledo and Ann Arbor, passes on these old railroad phrases still in common use:

Gandy Dancer: The Gandy Shovel Company made a long-handled, flat-bladed shovel that was used by both the Irish and Chinese laborers who built the transcontinental railroad which was commemorated by the driving of the 'golden spike.' When they had to pry tracks or ties with that long shovel, it often jammed underneath the heavy load with one of the workers sitting on the handle, bouncing it up and down. Hence, that worker was referred to as the gandy dancer.

High-balling: You can probably find a drink named for this rail term at every railroad tavern or depot-turned-tourist-attraction, but the original use had to do with the fact that a round emblem—usually a ball—was hoisted atop the rail yard signal pole to signify that the track ahead was clear and

the wages of a hired man, and set out for the Ypsilanti Seminary, his earthly possessions all packed in a small knapsack and the cash in his pocket consisting of one

half dollar and two quarters, Mexican currency. He found himself assigned a room in the dormitory of which the only furniture was an old wooden-bottom chair with some of the rungs missing. His bed he made on the bare floor with the knapsack for a pillow. With this hard beginning, he

persisted through the course and, along with six other Spartans, graduated from the Seminary into the University in 1857."

top speed was permitted. "High balling" was going at a high rate of speed.

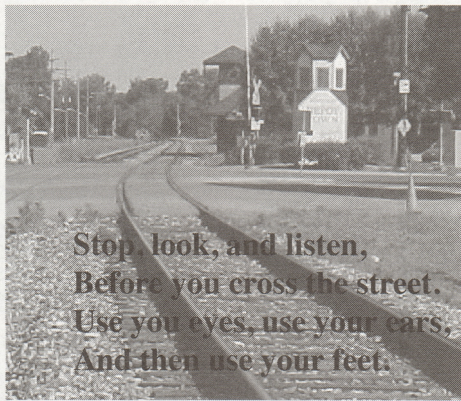
A full head of steam is another phrase transposed easily to the barroom. Originally it referred to the steam engine's boiler putting out maximum efficiency.

Letting off steam seems to do for our psyche almost as it did for the steam engine. Releasing that excess pressure was good for both to avoid an explosion.

To be **sidetracked** was to be taken into an unexpected siding and left for an undetermined amount of time. Sidetrack Grill continues to be rich in local railroad decor.

On the right track at first had to do with where the train was headed after it passed the switch. Now it signifies "right thinking" in a philosophical sense.

To **deadhead** a train was to bring it back empty and, when the followers of the Grateful Dead return from a concert, they describe themselves with the same colloquialism.



Same goes for crossing these tracks!

What is the sound of two hands clapping? Probably someone from A² "No-clap" legend explained more fully

There's a fancy fish restaurant in Ann Arbor where folks who never realized a railroad ran through the Athens of the Midwest nearly go nuts clapping their hands, jumping up and down, and dancing on the table tops every time a train rolls through on its way between Detroit and Chicago. They beam with satisfaction as if they have discovered some ancient custom included in the price of their fish dinner.

While it is true that Depot Towners don't applaud for passing trains like Ann Arbor tourists, we do not ignore them. We only pretend we don't notice them. Inside, we are smiling and we feel warm and sooty all over every time a train passes through.

That moment of respectful silence comes when we recount the safety rules we know so well and that quick look around afterward is when we're looking for someone with whom we can reiterate those rules.

Save this issue. Pass it around to someone you love—even if they think they already know everything.



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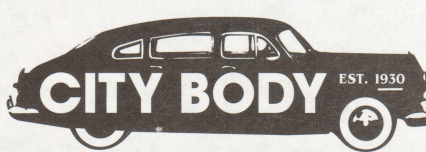
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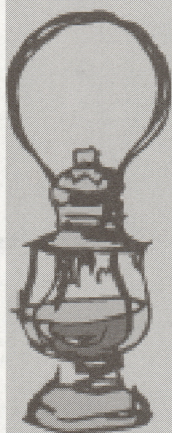
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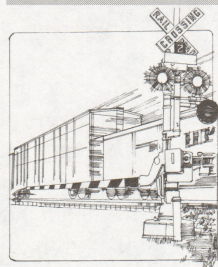
July's *Rag* photo of the men standing in front of Cady's Saloon (now BirdBrain at 52 East Cross) shows Ma Bush leaning out her third floor window. "Ma" ran a bordello at that upstairs location and many attribute her enterprise with the "bad old days" in Depot Town. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Business was booming in this railroad district in the 1890s. Grocery stores, shoe stores, a five-and-dime, and clothing stores for workers made this a thriving commercial spot. The dining rooms at the Follett House were among the best in the state. Several taverns served to Ypsilanti's working class and it was not at all unusual for a business such as Ma's to flourish. According to the four-digit phone numbers and names penciled on the wall in her place, she was well known among the Ypsilanti establishment.

Historians disagree on the origin of the term "red light district," but this block's traditions lean toward the "lantern theory." Brakemen and other railroad workers were said to have hung their (red) lanterns at the door of the bordello in case the conductor had to prepare the train to leave the station. A quick glance up and down the street told him where to knock to reassemble his crew.

The other "red light district" theory comes from Dodge City where the Red Light Saloon served as the nucleus for such erotic activity.

Clearly, Ypsi folk like the former theory best because of the historical connection to the great days of railroading. Those were the "good old days," when all the shops were at capacity.



Railroad safety tips will help you to return

- **Do not walk or drive any vehicle on or near rails or climb on railroad cars.** Walking on the rails may seem like fun, but you're taking the chance of being hit by the train.

- **When crossing the railroad tracks on foot, always cross at the highway-rail grade crossing and obey all signs and signals.** Stay off railroad bridges and trestles, and out of tunnels. They are not wide enough for both you and a train to be there at the same time. And it is you who will get trapped.

- **Never drive or walk around gates or flashing red lights.** If the gates are down, stop and stay in place. Do not cross the tracks until the gates are raised and the

lights have stopped flashing. Some highway rail crossings have multiple tracks. Make sure there isn't a second train hidden behind the first train.

- **Expect a train on any track at any time.** Most trains do not travel on a regular schedule. Be cautious at a highway-rail grade crossing at any time of the day or night.

- **Don't get trapped on a highway-rail grade crossing.** Never drive onto a highway-rail grade crossing until you are sure you can clear the tracks. Once you have started across the tracks, keep going.

- **Get out of your vehicle if it stalls.** If your vehicle stalls on a crossing, get everyone out and off the tracks immediately. If a train is coming, quickly move away from the tracks but in the direction from which the train is approaching.

- **Remember:** Any time is train time, and when it's a tie at the crossing, you lose.

Don't take our train tracks for granted!

- Amtrak owns or operates more than 600 operations facilities in the U.S.

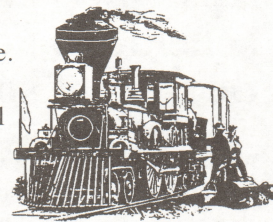
- After five years of use, railroad engines log at least a million miles and are taken out of service for complete rebuilding.

- Regularly rebuilt rolling stock can last for generations. You could be waving at the same trains you waved at as a kid.

Which is Ypsi's wrong side of the tracks?

There was no "wrong side" here.

Downtown was always the central business district, even though the street name



changed from the Great Sauk Trail to the Chicago Road to Congress Street to Michigan Avenue. But when the first addition to the original village extended to Forest Avenue the commercial district that rose to meet the railroad was no step-child to the Central Business District. Ypsi welcomed two downtowns and neither could be called a stereotypical "den of iniquity."

Woodruff's Grove started out a mile south and moved to the Sauk Trail after several economic disasters. They wanted to be where the traffic was. When the new village made its first addition, they intended to do business where the new traffic would come through. The Central Railroad was on its way and they were going to be ready.

Although the Huron River divides the two districts, the railroad was the center of this district—a long block away from the first settlement. But the depot district was never hailed as "the other side of the tracks." It grew around *both sides* of the tracks—on the *other side* of the river.

Vice and virtue, however, flourished most democratically on both sides of the tracks and the river in Ypsilanti.

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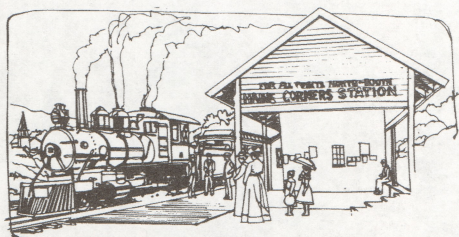
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Depot Town Rag, September 2007 3



The railroad crossing is a dangerous place

Source: Operation Lifesaver

According to Federal Railroad Administration statistics, 2,897 highway-rail grade crossing collisions occurred in 2006. A total of 79 of all 2006 highway-rail grade crossing collisions occurred in Michigan.

Railroad statistics for 2006

• 10 rail crossing fatalities

Since 1994, almost 6,500 people have been killed while trespassing on railroad rights-of-way and property (source: Federal Railroad Administration).

• 12 trespassing fatalities

530 pedestrian rail trespass fatalities occurred in 2006 in the U.S.

Railroad tracks, trestles, yards and equipment are private property. Walking or playing on them is illegal – trespassers are subject to arrest and fines. Too often the penalty is death.

The ONLY legal and safe place to cross tracks is at designated pedestrian or roadway crossings. Observe and obey all warning signs and signals.



Three quarters of a "Walk/Don't Walk" is better than none

When the pedestrian crossing signals went up at the corner of East Cross and North River Streets, traffic safety experts were perplexed at this unusual crossing pattern. The complexity of the two streets and a live railroad line compelled them to prohibit crossing from the Ypsilanti Automobile Heritage Museum to the Sidetrack Bar & Grill.

The other three sides of the square follow the more customary street-crossing patterns, they said in justification.

Kids "get it," but it's often the adults who cross anyway. Safety experts urge us all to set the good example at this corner.

From Dexter Area Historical Society Museum Archives,
The Dexter Leader, 5 August 1915



"My recollections of the Fourth of July" by Ebenezer Smith

"The 4th of July was the day on which the first train of cars on the Michigan Central Railroad came into the Village of Dexter..."

"The conveyance was a common farm lumber wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen.

"...We were with the eager, expectant crowd that watched for the approaching train; and large numbers of the men ran to meet and welcome it as it came in."

DAHSM editor's note: "On July 4, 1827, Judge Dexter's Independence Day oration predicted that the horse drawn railroad in some eastern states would become steam driven like those in Europe."

In the next Rag

Scary stories abound in old neighborhoods like this. We've been collecting them for years and now we'll have many of them together in one neat little package.



Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"

A monthly publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 970235

Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

To the editor:

thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

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Depot Town Rag, September 2007 **4**

This quiz could save your life

1. Flashing red lights at highway-rail grade crossings require motorists to:

- A. Toss a coin to decide whether to stop or go
- B. Stop. Let the train pass.



STOP and wait for the train. Flashing lights must be treated like a stop sign. Proceed only when it is safe to do so.

2. A train is approaching. Are these statements true?

- A. The train is closer and faster than you think.
- B. A train striking a car is like your car crushing a soda can.



YES, both statements are true. If it's a tie at the crossing, you lose.

3. What does the advance warning sign near a highway-rail grade crossing mean?



- A. Slow down and prepare to stop if a train is coming.
- B. Restrooms and recreation are ahead.

SLOW DOWN. Look and listen for a train. Stop if a train is coming.

4. At a crossing with two or more tracks, should you proceed as soon as the



You can be fined for walking along the railroad right-of-way

last railcar clears the crossing?

- A. Yes
- B. No



NO. Wait for a clear view in both directions. Make sure another train is not coming down the tracks.

5. A train can be expected on any track at any time.

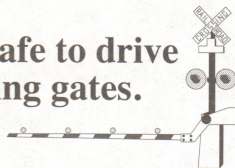
- A. True.
- B. False



Definitely TRUE. Don't be fooled by your familiarity with a crossing. Trains run any time, day or night.

6. It's never safe to drive around crossing gates.

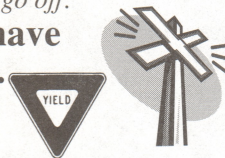
- A. True
- B. False



TRUE. NEVER drive around gates. You are violating the law and endangering your passengers. You must not proceed until gates go up and lights go off.

7. These signs have the same effect.

- A. True
- B. False



TRUE. Both signs require drivers to YIELD. At a highway-rail grade crossing you must yield to an approaching train.

Train spotters take huge risks

- In Ann Arbor, 76-year-old Elaine Nutt was charged with a misdemeanor by Ann Arbor police for trespassing on the railroad tracks. So far, this has cost her \$500 with the possibility of a \$100 fine and 30 days in jail. Her friends and relatives wrote critical letters to the editor.

- A man was hit by the Amtrak train on March 12 in Chelsea while he was "standing on the tracks," according to the *Ann Arbor News*. Police did not release any further information, but the man was reported to be "upgraded to good condition at the UM Medical Center" Chelsea police said. No mention was made of fines or imprisonment.

- Meanwhile, Ypsilanti folks watch the crossing signals and never walk the tracks. Those giant, hurtling steel behemoths still ply these tracks every day, so get those radio plugs out of your ears, hang up your cell phone, and listen for the whistle.



WDIV's Vote 4 The Best contest receives many Depot Town nominations

Many local businesses have been nominated and are piling up the votes from their loyal clientele:

- **Aubree's Saloon & Sticks Pool Parlor**, best bar/pool parlor
- **Café Luwak**, best sandwich shop
- **Queen of Hearts Pastries & Bakery**, best wedding cakes
- **Redbud Productions**, best theatre company
- **Riverside Art Gallery**, best art gallery
- **Sidetrack Grill & Bar**, best burger

You can nominate other businesses by simply following the necessary directions to category links.

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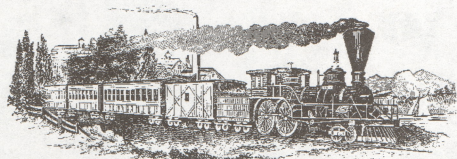
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Ypsilanti railroad schemes had varying degrees of success

1831: Detroit & St. Joseph Railroad plans to connect Lake Erie to Lake Michigan. Bought out in 1837 by the "Central Road", line completed to Ypsilanti in 1838

1836: Monroe & Ypsilanti Railroad plan fizzles. Monroe & Ann Arbor Railroad fails similarly.

1838: Ypsilanti & Tecumseh Railroad gets a few sections graded, then work ceases.

1839: Michigan Central Railroad continues to Ann Arbor.

1841: Michigan Central Railroad reaches Dexter

1868: Detroit, Hillsdale & Indiana Railroad (Huckleberry Railroad) reaches Ypsilanti. Merges with Lake Shore & Michigan Southern. Ypsilanti branch becomes New York Central.

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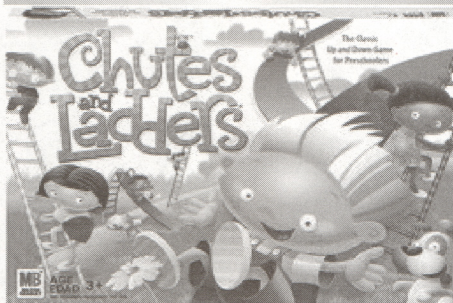
RAGTIME

Coming events

Thursday 13 September
**Final
CRUISE NIGHT**
for 2007

23 September
**Dia De La Familia
Latina Festival**
in Riverside Park

29 September
**FALLAPALOOZA
Family Festival**
9 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Michigan Legos and model trains
Farmer's Market
Giant Chutes and Ladders game
Corn Hole Toss
Scarecrow Contest • Rock Wall
Face painting

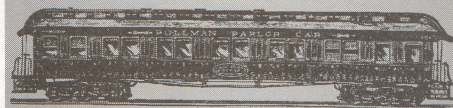


1 December
**Christmas Holiday
Window display awards**
Totally old concept: Christmas in December

2 December
Holiday Home Tour

31 December
New Year Jubilee

Dozens of venues in
downtown and Depot Town



Caboose rehab first of CDC projects to come

The neighborhood cut a ceremonial ribbon on August 20 to announce the completion of DTA's caboose rehabilitation, the first project of the newly formed Depot Town Community Development Corporation.

DTA's newly formed CDC has shown significant progress toward establishing and beginning the process of bringing economic development to Depot Town. CDC's first completed project was the restoration of the Caboose and Market Plaza just in time for the Channel 2 Zip Trip.

At an August 20th dedication ceremony at the Caboose, CDC revealed its Riverside Park and Frog Island Development plan prepared by consultant, Truman Hudson of DexDesign, for the DTCDC. The plan, adopted by the DTCDC, is designed to bring health conscious programs and development to Ypsilanti's parks.

YPS Foundation needs your help

Volunteers are needed to help with a variety of tasks including clerical, mailings, gathering contact information from files, helping with events, and answering phones. Put your skills to work for a few hours each week helping to create learning opportunities for kids! Work with fun people in a great environment. Call Carol at the Ypsilanti Public Schools Foundation today: 734-714-1080.



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